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ABSTRACT

A conflict resolution curriculum is suggested as a pilot program in a classroom for students with behavior disorders, as these students have more referrals for detention and suspension and more encounters with law enforcement agencies than do other students. Using a modeling approach, all students would subsequently benefit, as the program expands to regular classrooms and is used to reduce behavior problems as well as enhance problem-solving, language, and communication skills. The curriculum integrates conflict resolution into language, literature, social studies, employability skills, and life skills curriculums. The goal of the semester-long curriculum is to provide students with new attitudes and skills for coping with conflict. The curriculum's eight objectives include: (1) define and discuss violence, (2) examine how violence is portrayed in various media, (3) examine student anger and tendencies toward violence, (4) analyze the dangers of fighting or becoming involved in a violent incident, (5) understand the principles of conflict resolution and demonstrate being able to use them to resolve conflicts, (6) look at the philosophical views of peacemakers to illustrate the principles of nonviolence, (7) examine what the community expects of its citizens, and (8) develop a task force to mediate disputes. Learning activities and specific curriculum components are outlined. Both formative and summative curriculum evaluation is encouraged. (Contains 17 references.) (JDD)

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Conflict Resolution: An Interdisciplinary Curriculum Approach

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Running head: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Conflict Resolution: An Interdisciplinary Curriculum Approach

The classroom is the command center where teachers win or loose the battle for academic achievement and order. If disruptive behavior prevails and discipline is weak or lacking, then the chances for victory are slim. Maintaining order and discipline is not exclusively a classroom responsibility. The "school culture" has a significant influence on school behavior. School culture is recognized as the atmosphere and tone for everything that happens in the school. Finn (1988) points out that students learn best in a school culture that is orderly, sets high standards, and everyone is treated with respect.

The Multiagency Service Network for Severely Emotionally Disturbed Students (SED Network) has, due to collaborative efforts with Florida's Department of Education (DOE) and Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS), published a newsletter (Appendix A) that clearly shows that the number of delinquency referrals have almost doubled in the past ten years. Researchers and educators point to a variety of societal, familial, individual, and educational factors which contribute to violence and

disruptive behavior in our schools. Violence can be seen in art, sports, entertainment, and literature. We live in a violent society; it is inevitable that violence permeates our schools. Approximately one out of every 18 youths in America is assaulted, robbed, or raped each year (Wetzel, 1988). Menacker, Weldon, & Hurwitz (1990) assert that socially disorganized, crime-ridden neighborhoods produce socially disorganized, crime-ridden schools. Each day, 100,000 kids have guns at school, 700,000 carry knives, and 14,000 students and 40 teachers are attacked each day (USA Weekend, 1993). The escalating discord which leads to violence and disruption in our schools is a problem that must be dealt with immediately if students and teachers are to engage in meaningful learning and teaching.

In response to the epidemic of school violence, schools are turning to conflict resolution as a means to help students control their anger before anyone raises a fist or weapon (Williams, 1991). While a school can do much to create a safer environment for its students, preventing violence is the best long-term strategy (Gaustad, 1991). An effective way to prevent school violence is to teach students the behaviors,

skills, and values that are associated with peaceful behavior in all environments.

A curriculum, however well designed, must be implemented throughout a school district if it is to make any impact (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Much of what is planned and developed is never implemented because teachers become accustomed to the status quo or prefer to make changes in small gradual steps. Armstrong (1989), believes that new programs representing modest deviations from present practices which involve only a few people are relatively easy to implement, particularly when those who will teach the innovations have been members of the curriculum development team. These people have a grasp of the rationale which initiated the changes, in addition to being knowledgeable about the new curriculum scope and sequence. Often, these educators have developed a sense of pride and "ownership" in the new program (Armstrong, 1989).

Conflict resolution would begin as a pilot program in an individual classroom for students with behavior disorders using the modeling approach. Teachers, parents, school administrators, law officials, and community businesses realize the need is imperative for

all students in the district. Even though curriculum is a document aimed at guiding internal operations, it may be put together as a response to external mandates or requirements (English, 1987). Students in this class statistically have more referrals for detention and suspension; in addition to having the most encounters with law enforcement agencies, when compared with their peers who are not labeled as having behavior disorders. The rationale is that if students with behavior disorders are able to demonstrate significant benefits from participating in this program; all students can benefit, especially when the program is specifically tailored for each class. The reduction of behavior problems is not the only motivation for introducing conflict resolution into schools. Its major value appears to be the learning it evokes among students, particularly problem-solving skills, language development, and communication skills in general (Koch, 1988).

Curriculum development should include: the director of special education services, the coordinator of services for students with behavior disorders, teachers, parents, students, school site administrators, and community business partners. Zais

(1976), believes the convergence of formal authority and integral function will produce the best possible conditions for effective curriculum development. Macdonald (1971) advocates that all parties affected by the curriculum should be involved in deciding its nature and purpose.

The modeling approach presumes that teachers will be more willing to adopt a program change if they see it being used effectively in their own building by other teachers they know and respect (Armstrong,1989). Once the program can statistically prove that student disruptions have decreased significantly, other teachers may elect to adopt the program. Students and teachers can then serve as models for other schools in the district; providing assistance and encouragement. Their commitment can help "sell" the new program (Armstrong, 1989).

Curriculum developers must make decisions that will allow for consistency and flexibility in the program, and if it will eventually be used in multiple settings. Curriculum is the tool that ensures that work performed conforms to the purpose for which the work is required (English, 1987). According to Armstrong (1989), now is the time for the curriculum-

development group to develop plans for getting program information distributed, and to oversee its initial and continued use. Teachers must continue to monitor the program's effectiveness in the classroom, and gather information from significant others as to its effectiveness over multiple environments. After many assessments and revisions, this interdisciplinary curriculum may serve as a model program throughout the school district making significant positive changes in various school cultures.

The aim of this interdisciplinary curriculum is to prepare our youth to enter the adult world as knowledgeable, productive, and peaceable members of our society. Teachers will integrate conflict resolution into the language, literature, social studies, employability skills, and life skills curriculums. Adolescents who are experiencing an identity crisis and trying to reconcile conflicts with parents might study history to illuminate the origins of parents' attitudes and beliefs, considering the present validity of these origins (McNeil, 1990). They might use the sciences to meet their need for coherence, or the arts to express their feelings. By incorporating the study of conflict resolution into the established curriculum, teachers

may be able to relate relevant concepts of a peaceful existence to students' own lives (London, 1988).

This program would support the school's philosophy of providing a quality education for all students while focusing on individual needs. Every school has its unique set of circumstances which requires a philosophical base. Used as a guide, it will promote the highest level of achievement for its students. Ornstein & Hunkins (1993) agree that it is essential for curriculum planners to identify their philosophical and social orientations to avoid having limited or confused rationales.

Phenomenology, sometimes called humanistic psychology, and classified as nontechnical-nonscientific, is a learning theory based upon existentialist philosophy (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Phenomenologists agree that learning must be explained in terms of wholeness of the problem. Students are to be viewed as a whole person, involved in life experiences which are positive, purposeful, and active. This interdisciplinary curriculum being designed for students with conduct disorders uses the holistic approach which is therapeutic in nature. It considers the attitudes and feelings of students, and views

learning as a lifelong process. It contains elements of moral judgement, value clarification, cooperative learning, and the freedom necessary for students to attain their fullest potential.

Information is growing at an exponential rate, and keeping pace with the rapidly changing technology may be overwhelming. Therefore, we need to organize a curriculum that is conducive to change while being relevant to students' needs. This relevant, student-centered curriculum will take students into the community and work experiences. Ornstein (1988) suggests ten knowledge areas which are futuristic and form the basis of an interdisciplinary curriculum. Knowledge should contain: (1) the three R's, (2) learning strategies, (3) applications to the real world, (4) an improved emotional and spiritual state, (5) a variety of forms, (6) the world-of-work and technology, (7) an understanding of bureaucracy, (8) the retrieval of information, (9) a lifelong process, and (10) values. This total range of knowledge may serve as a guide to select the subject matter, organize the curriculum, and evaluate the program.

The goal of this interdisciplinary curriculum is to provide students with new attitudes and skills for

coping with conflict which is an unavoidable part of life. The program combines eight objectives of specific content material into a single unit of instruction which will be implemented in eighteen weeks or one semester by a team of three teachers. Students targeted to enter the "work experience program" during the second semester, will be the first group to test the pilot program. It is crucial that students with behavior disorders develop an understanding of a peaceable existence, and have the opportunity to practice those newly acquired skills in multiple environments before entering the world-of-work. Most business leaders understand that the disabled should be given the opportunity to be productive members of the community. Educators who advocate for school and business partnerships, must prepare their students for acceptance by the community.

The diverse, multicultural population that constitutes society's present work force faces ethical dilemmas on the job that bring pressures to protect their own or their company's interests, at the risk of loosing their personal integrity. Lankard (1991) believes that employers and vocational and career development personnel are recognizing the need for

decision-making and problem-solving skills that will facilitate negotiation and conflict resolution in the work place. Conflicts arise between two or more personally held values, principles, obligations, and the need to achieve a desired outcome. Inger (1991) defines conflict resolution as a two part approach: (a) a constructive approach to that helps people with opposing positions work together to arrive at a mutually acceptable compromise, and (b) as the body of knowledge and practice developed to realize the approach.

When generating objectives, educators ideally consider all domains of learning (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). One should also consider the various "ways" that individuals learn when analyzing the domains of objectives. To produce a pathway for learning, the following eight objectives were considered as essential and will enable students to: (a) define and discuss violence, (b) examine how violence is portrayed in various media, (c) examine their own anger and their own tendencies toward violence, (d) analyze the dangers of fighting or becoming involved in a violent incident, (e) understand the principles of conflict resolution and demonstrate being able to use them to resolve

conflicts, (f) look at the philosophical views of peacemakers to illustrate the principles of nonviolence, (g) examine what the community expects of its citizens, and (h) develop a task force to mediate disputes. The objectives of this interdisciplinary unit were designed to guide the selection of content and instruction for teachers. The unique presentation of ideas, concepts, values, and skills could also link content within particular subjects (Tyler, 1969).

Students will demonstrate the following four activities for each objective: (a) active listening, (b) cooperation between disputants, (c) acceptance of each other's differences, and (d) creative problem-solving. More specific suggestions for activities are: create anti-violence posters, visit a jail, videotape and discuss the news, read culturally diverse literature, collect current events that contain violence, etc. Teachers know how their students learn. This program allows for teacher creativity in selecting educational experiences that would promote the attainment of objectives. Each objective will contain the following six components: (a) overview of subject matter, (b) a collection of related reading materials, (c) vocabulary, (d) multi-modal group activities, (e)

student journals, and (f) closure activities. These key elements could serve as organizers, and means, and methods of instruction; and relate different learning experiences among different subjects (Tyler, 1969).

Evaluation is an important part of curriculum development which determines three key elements: (a) program effectiveness, (b) realization of objectives, and (c) whether learning experiences actually produced the intended results. A formative evaluation encompasses those activities undertaken to improve an existing program and it takes place at a number of specified points during curriculum development (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). A formative evaluation for this interdisciplinary curriculum will take place every two weeks which will permit teachers to determine if objective outcomes were achieved. All those affected by the program can make judgements about the program; their opinion is more important than a clinical analysis of the program (Tyler, 1969). To achieve the best possible results, a checklist as shown in Table 1, will be given to those directly involved with student progress. Immediately after the distribution of checklists, the curriculum-development group will analyze the data and modify the curriculum as needed.

Table 1

Formative evaluation checklist.

The school administrator can demonstrate that:

- Students are learning basic skills
- Administrators and teachers have an additional option in handling behavior problems
- Behavior problems are reduced
- School morale improves.

Teachers experience:

- Less conflict in the classroom
- Improved classroom and school climate
- Less time and energy in handling disruption
- More time for teaching
- New skills for teaching
- Attitudinal and behavior improvement in specific students.

Students experience success in:

- Learning to be responsible for their own behavior
- Learning to be responsible and responsive to their peers in a cooperative constructive mode
- Learning to improve communication skills
- Accepting and fulfilling relevant social responsibilities
- Learning to be fair
- Increasing their involvement in citizenship activities
- Learning skills in dispute resolution in a protected environment
- Improving self-concept.

Note. From "Mediated Dispute Resolution--Resolving Disputes: Students Can Do It Better" by M.S. Koch, 1988, NASSP Bulletin, 72, p. 18.

The purpose of curriculum development is to make a difference in the classroom, the school, the district, and society. Curriculum enables us to get something. In this instance, it is a safe and productive classroom, a safe and productive workplace, and a society which promotes peace. People are receptive to change, when change is attractive to them. When using a modeling approach which embraces an open classroom policy, a comfortable working atmosphere is created. Faculty members are more productive, change is accepted readily, and programs are implemented effectively. To accept an innovation people need to perceive its quality, worth, and practicality (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). The open classroom policy encourages personal communication which is crucial to the success of a new program. The fact that people are brought together to discuss a new program gives testimony that the new program has significance, and that professionals are valued (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993).

After a program has been completely developed and then implemented, a summative evaluation takes place. It will render a conclusion as to the quality and effectiveness of the instructional unit. The summative evaluation for this interdisciplinary curriculum will

require input from social workers, case managers, teachers, law enforcement officials, resource officers, school administration, parents, and students. These individuals will have the opportunity to collectively draw conclusions as to whether students have progressed in the following five areas: (a) students have learned to care about others and behave accordingly; (b) students have developed problem-solving, social, and employment skills; (c) students have learned to give and receive help from peers; (d) students have fostered positive interaction among peers from different racial, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds; (e) students have learned a sense of empowerment, and can become productive members of our community. Schools may need to take the lead in seeking to establish collaborative relationships with other agencies so that school disruptions can be reduced, education can be enhanced, and children can be successful.

Combining various strategies may prove to be more successful than concentrating on just one or two. Strategies also need to be adapted to the immediate environment. Teachers will be able to teach and manage their classrooms more effectively if schools confronted their problems directly, using authoritative tactics in

handling cases of misbehavior. Schools may indirectly reduce student alienation and frustration by providing those students with intrinsically rewarding experiences that contribute to personal liberation and development. By enabling students to resolve their own conflicts, we may be synthesizing the finest potential in the school, namely the creative constructive dynamic inherent in conflict (Koch, 1988).

Schools desiring to achieve positive results will support school goals and encourage cooperation and consensus among staff. There are many strategies which contribute to the creation of less disruptive students, but these strategies may prove ineffective without cooperative learning, student rewards, recognition programs, and strong leadership. The best approach to discipline creates an environment that nurtures good behavior. Programs that treat the entire school, and eventually the entire district, are most likely to succeed. Isolating discipline problems or simply banishing misconduct does not ensure an environment conducive to learning. The ultimate goal of discipline, after all, is to foster learning, virtue, strong character, and in time, self-discipline.

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Appendix A

SED Network Newsletter

Multiagency Service Network for Severely Emotionally Disturbed Students **June 1993**

Here is a sample of some of the demographics from the Florida KIDS Count Data

% of Single Parent Households	1990	22.5
# of Infant Deaths (Ages 0-1)	1990	1,909
# of Child Deaths (Ages 1-14)	1990	833
# of Teen Violent Deaths	1990	599
# of Runaways	1991-92	52,903
# of Maltreatment Cases	1991	173,375
# of Student Enrollment (Pre-K - 12)	Fall 1991	1,929,336
Graduation Rate	1990-91	78.6
# of Corporal Punishments	1991-92	24,198
# of Out-of-School Suspensions	1991-92	159,586
# of In-School Suspensions	1991-92	142,709
# of Delinquency Referrals	1982-83 1991-92	70,965 137,698
# of Detentions	1982-83 1991-92	15,200 23,204
# of Juvenile Commitments	1982-83 1991-92	7,477 13,825
# of Transfers to Adult Court	1982-83 1991-92	3,077 6,273

The KIDS Count Data also includes a breakdown by each county of the above information. *For your copy, contact Kathy Shanley, FMHI (813) 974-4500.*

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